



# YEARS OF USEFULNESS

THE DELAWARE COMMISSION for the BLIND



MRS. IRENEE DU PONT  
*Honorary Chairman, Delaware Commission  
for the Blind*

*The accomplishments of the Delaware Commission for the Blind during the past fifty years are due in no small degree to the support and leadership of Mrs. du Pont. She served faithfully as chairman of the Commission from 1924 to 1957. Upon her retirement she was granted the title of Honorary Chairman by her fellow commissioners.*



## Introduction

The persons for whom this commemorative brochure is written will never read it. For they cannot see to read—at least in the sense that most of us think of seeing.

In the pages that follow is traced a half century of work—arduous, painstaking, sometimes disheartening work—directed toward one goal, permitting those to “see” who have no sight. The work is that of the Delaware Commission for the Blind which this year celebrates its golden anniversary of service to Delawareans—in particular to blind Delawareans.

It is the purpose of the Delaware Commission for the Blind to promote the well-being of all the blind people of the state in such a manner as to encourage self-respect, self-reliance and good citizenship. This brochure is dedicated to these goals. It commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Delaware Commission for the Blind.

## *Over the Years*

### Delaware Commission for the Blind

Records indicate that no organized program for the blind existed in the state of Delaware before 1906. Prior to that time only a few individual efforts were made in that field.

Blind children were occasionally educated in Pennsylvania or Maryland. Adult blind were usually left to their own devices; there was no agency to train them or to help them find employment. The use of blind persons in industry was unheard of. Except for an occasional blind salesman or piano tuner, the blind of that era were incapable of self-support.

At the turn of the century the state of Delaware set aside a small appropriation for the education of the handicapped. At that time, however, the public attached little importance to the education of handicapped persons.

The picture brightened in 1906, however, when a group of citizens met in the New Century Club of Wilmington to discuss the plight of the blind in Delaware. Ladies present at the meeting, including representatives of the Sunshine Society and the New Century Club, agreed to raise funds, and a new organization was born. Its name was the Delaware Committee for the Blind.

The principal figure in this community group was C. Reginald Van Trump, a Wilmington businessman who had become acutely aware of the problems concerned with blindness when he lost his sight. Mr. Van Trump succeeded in interesting Bishop Leighton Coleman, an influential Episcopal clergyman, in the project.

In 1909 Mr. Van Trump and Mr. Edward Mauldin made an appeal for funds to the state



of Delaware. Mr. Mauldin, who assisted Mr. Van Trump in much of the early work and is a blind "client" today, has been associated with the Commission longer than any other single person.



*The broom, formerly the trademark of the blind worker, was distributed in Wilmington in the manner pictured above. With the passing years emphasis has been changed; as a measure of productivity the broom has been replaced by such things as the typewriter and the milling machine.*

As a result of their efforts, the state legislature made a \$1500 appropriation and, more significantly, passed a bill which established the Delaware Commission for the Blind. A second appropriation was made by the City of Wilmington, through the Wilmington Institute Free Library, for the purchase of books of raised type.

The first meeting of the Commission was held on April 6, 1909, in the Wilmington library. In attendance at the first meeting were Mr. Van Trump, Mr. Wilmer Palmer, Mr. Arthur L. Bailey, Mrs. Elizabeth Robinson and Mrs. Lewis Mustard. Members of the newly-formed Commission who were absent were Mrs. Beniah Watson and Mrs. George W. Marshall.

At this first meeting, the bill which established the Commission was presented and formally approved. Mr. Van Trump was elected as the first chairman of the Commission. Mr. Bailey was named secretary-treasurer.

Two "divisions" were established at that initial meeting. The supervision of care and training of the blind in the portion of Delaware south of Middletown was the responsibility of Mrs. Watson, Mrs. Marshall and Mrs. Mustard. Jurisdiction over the blind of Wilmington and rural New Castle County north of Wilmington was given to the remaining members of the Commission.

A final item of business, and a significant one, at that first meeting was the motion of Mr. Palmer to appoint Miss Nellie Curren as teacher to visit adult blind persons in their homes, tutor them in braille and hand crafts and, it was hoped, lighten the burden of blindness.

The newly-formed Delaware Commission for the Blind was immediately concerned with the problem of providing gainful employment for those without sight. A sales exchange was soon established in one room at 307 Delaware Avenue in Wilmington where articles made by blind persons might be sold.

#### COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND.

C. Reginald Van Trump Heads the New Body.

The Delaware commission for the blind was organized with C. Reginald Van Trump as chairman, Arthur L. Bailey, librarian of the Wilmington Institute Free Library, secretary and treasurer, Wilmer Palmer, auditor, and Mrs. Elizabeth Robinson, head of the executive committee. Mrs. Robinson will organize a committee to take charge of the work mapped out for this county. Mrs. George W. Marshall, of Milford; Mrs. L. A. Mustard, of Lewes, and Mrs. Beniah Watson, of Dover, will perform a similar work for Kent and Sussex counties.

Plans for getting the blind in touch with the people of the State so that work of the blind could be sold were discussed. Under the teacher employed in this State the blind have learned to make useful articles, and the commission purposes to find a market for them.

*A clipping from a 1909 issue of a Wilmington newspaper announces the formation of the Delaware Commission for the Blind.*

A significant expansion in the program of the Commission was made possible in 1911 when the General Assembly increased the appropriation of the state to \$3,000. A year later, private



C. REGINALD VAN TRUMP

*First chairman of the Delaware Commission for the Blind and the real pioneer in the work in this field in the state.*

funds were raised for the purchase of the building located at the present site of the Commission headquarters, 305-07 West 8th Street in Wilmington.

According to the census of 1910 there were 138 known cases of blindness in Delaware. A survey made by the Commission in 1913 revealed 286 blind residents of the state. Of 35 prospective students, 11 were enrolled in out-of-state schools for the blind.

Delaware's first concert by an orchestra of blind musicians was presented in June, 1914. The money raised by this was used for a fund for the blind. This was the first of a series of many such musical programs.

A workshop was established by the Commission for the employment of blind workers. This

gradually expanded until by 1914 the number of blind employees totaled 16.

By 1916 the Commission was able to report a substantial output from the workshop. A total of 1449 rugs were produced that year, along with 686 yards of woven carpet, 1019 dozen brooms, and 282 baskets. Added to this were 1304 chairs which had been reseated and 171 baskets repaired.

Demands for space in the workshop were so great that in 1917 the members of the Commission decided to construct an addition to the original building. The two-story addition was attached to the rear of the existing structure.

In 1919 the state legislature of Delaware appropriated \$10,000 for the growing program of the Delaware Commission for the Blind. In this same year the Red Diamond seal was registered with the state department in Dover, for use on all articles manufactured in the Commission workshop. The use of the seal was later discontinued.





## The Head- quarters

*A photograph taken about 1920 shows the early edition of the headquarters of the Delaware Commission for the Blind, 305-07 West Eighth Street, Wilmington.*

In 1919 Miss Cora E. Turner was appointed as workshop superintendent to supervise the business management under the direction of the Executive Committee.

The services of the Delaware Commission for the Blind continued to grow, and in 1920 sales of manufactured products totaled more than \$13,000. A dozen students were enrolled in schools for the blind that year, and a total of 301 were aided in some manner by the Commission.

The year 1924 marked the death of the man who had pioneered the work for the blind in Delaware—Mr. Van Trump. Mrs. Irene du Pont was elected as the new chairman of the Commission and Dr. G. C. McElpatrick, secretary and treasurer. The third member of the executive committee was Mr. Herbert B. Mearns. The new superintendent was Miss Cora Newman.

In 1928 the Commission started a craft class for blind women. Miss Ruth Thorpe from



*The same building forty years later, altered only by a face-lifting and the construction of a workshop annex.*

Maryland joined the Commission staff as a home teacher for Kent and Sussex Counties.

Through the generosity of Mrs. du Pont, the Commission was able to acquire Camp Landis, later called Landis Lodge, in 1929. The camp, now located on Newport Gap Pike, permits the blind of Delaware to enjoy a peaceful, two-week vacation each summer. Except for a lone interruption during World War II, the camp has been in continuous operation since 1930.

In 1935 Dr. Francis J. Cummings joined the Delaware Commission for the Blind. After losing his sight early in life, Dr. Cummings graduated from the Pennsylvania Institute for the Blind, and later the University of Delaware and the University of Pennsylvania. In 1942 Dr. Cummings was named executive secretary of the Commission.

World War II coincided with a re-evaluation of the services of the Commission and a general expansion of its program. Where Commission staff members previously had been concerned primarily with the education of children and

the employment of adults in the workshop, the Commission now began to look toward even higher goals—entry into such fields as social service, vocational rehabilitation, financial assistance and nursery classes.

Under Dr. Cummings' direction, blind persons were placed in industrial jobs where they could make a contribution to the war effort. A training course in machine shop techniques was organized at Brown Vocational High School in Wilmington.

In 1944 the Commission launched a vocational rehabilitation program, following the enactment of Public Law 113, the federal vocational Rehabilitation Act. The program now includes physical restoration, training and placement. Changes in 1945 made the Delaware Commission for the Blind subject to the provisions of the Social Security Act as it applied to aid to the blind.

The post-war period marked the establishment of the Commission's vending stand program throughout the state, providing additional sources of employment for the Delaware blind.

## *Today's Program for the Blind*

### Education . . .

In 1950 a nursery school for the pre-school blind children of Delaware was established by the commission. The school was operated until 1958 at Sunnybrook, near Wilmington, where an attractive building and large playground provided a comfortable, cheerful training center. The property was made available by the Delaware Anti-Tuberculosis Society, owner of the site.

Sunnybrook was open to blind children between the ages of three and six who lived within reasonable travelling distance. The school was in operation forty-eight weeks of the year. The nursery school and kindergarten closed on a happy note last year. The virtual conquest of retrolental fibroplasia by the medical profession drastically reduced the number of blind babies. The function of the nursery school at Sunnybrook is being continued through field work with individual families.

*The words you are now reading cannot be seen by a blind person; to be understood they must first be transformed into braille or raised symbols.*



A member of the Commission staff who is experienced in working with blind children of pre-school age gives instructions and advice to parents of young blind children to help them guide the activities of the child until he reaches school age.





*Two blind clients of the Commission, Henry Coursey, Sr., of Lewes and Mrs. Thelma Roberts of Wilmington, learn to weave and make leather belts. Their instructor, Sebastian Demanop, is well acquainted with their problem, since he too is without sight.*



*The blind frequently develop a keen sense of touch. Many such as W. Roger Cranston learn to type.*

In 1956 a first grade braille class was established on a two-year experimental basis in cooperation with the Wilmington city schools. Since then a second class has been added. Grades 1 and 2 for blind students are conducted at the Lore School in Wilmington. Other children are sent at state expense to special schools for blind children in Pennsylvania and Maryland.

Boys and girls with visual handicaps are given guidance and equipment by the Commission to enable them to attend public and private schools in Delaware. These children are aided in their educational endeavors by the cooperative relationship which exists between the schools and the Commission.

Adults as well as children are included in the educational program of the Commission. Home teachers make regular visits to homes of blind adults to instruct them in normal daily activities, household management, handicraft skills, braille typing, and script writing. Group classes are held occasionally in the Commission headquarters in Wilmington.

## Vocational Rehabilitation . . .



*The workshop in the Commission headquarters in Wilmington provides employment for a number of blind persons. The Commission contracts with industrial firms for the performance of certain tasks within the scope of blind workers.*

Federal grants to the states to further a program of training and placement of the handicapped were made possible by the enactment of Public Law 565, enacted by the 83rd Congress. The program in Delaware is administered by the Vocational Department of the Delaware Commission for the Blind.

The goal of the Commission's vocational rehabilitation program is to help all blind people in the state develop qualities of self-confidence and self-reliance, and enable them through guidance, training and selective placement to achieve a satisfying way of life.

Services of the Vocational Rehabilitation Department include physical restoration, securing of prosthetic appliances, training for trade or profession in workshop or school, guidance and counseling, placement in suitable employment in industry, commerce, agriculture or special workshop, and financial aid necessary for beginning a business or profession.

The Delaware Commission for the Blind not only searches for employment for blind people





*Specialized jobs, such as the preparation of Ban-Lon samples shown here, are also performed in the Commission workshop.*

*In the photograph at the right, blind worker Frank Bruce of Wilmington is repairing a chair in the commission workshop.*



but also provides many jobs in its own operation. The Business Enterprises Program was established by the Commission for this purpose. Under this program qualified blind men and women are trained to operate vending stands and snack bars in public and private buildings, factories and other suitable locations. Vending stands are located in Dover, Milford, Newark, Wilmington, Yorklyn and elsewhere throughout the state.

The vending program provides continuous employment for many visually handicapped persons, enabling them to become useful, self-supporting citizens of their communities. In addition, the program performs a valuable service to the public and to employees of the companies in which these enterprises are located. The type of operation varies from a small unit handling only magazines, newspapers, candy and tobacco products to complete cafeteria service.

Employees of vending stands and cafeterias participate in an income-sharing plan and re-

ceive a paid vacation, sick leave and social security coverage.

Blind persons are tested in the Commission's training center to determine the type of work for which they are best suited. Vocational rehabilitation personnel consider manual and psychological diagnosis, aid in making realistic decisions, recommend physical restoration to

enhance the appearance or to increase the efficiency with which a client may perform his tasks, and offer any further guidance and counseling. After the training has been completed and the trainees are ready for outside employment, suitable jobs for them are sought.

Blind persons who are unable to find employment in the business community are placed in

*Vending stands such as this one at Sears, Roebuck and Company in Wilmington provide employment for many blind Delawareans.*





*Ben Ross of Wilmington handles machines with the ease of a worker with sight. Mr. Ross was the first blind Delawarean to be employed in industry. This photograph was taken during World War II.*

a workshop maintained by the Commission. Work is obtained through contracts with local business firms for such tasks as tag stringing, envelope stuffing and simple assembly operations. Traditional crafts such as chair caning, rug weaving and rubber mat assembly are still carried on by the blind, although to a lesser extent as more contract work becomes available.

For the most part the emphasis in the vocational rehabilitation program is placed on helping blind persons to find gainful employment. This aspect of the program may include contacting prospective employees in the area—plants, offices, hospitals, etc.—where a survey of the activities of the establishment may be made.

Rehabilitation may require that a blind person be provided with equipment to enable him to work at his trade, or funds to purchase a license to practice his chosen profession. The loss of sight by a housewife necessitates the provision of household equipment designed for use by the blind.



## *Making the Adjustment*

### Social Service . . .



A trained social worker interviews blind persons in their homes and consults with relatives, doctors and representatives of other social agencies. After the consultations, the worker evaluates the resources available and suggests the best solution.

Also, the Delaware Commission for the Blind makes available a braille library, talking books, counsel on sight preservation, and financial aid.

The braille library maintained by the Commission contains books and magazines printed in braille which may be borrowed by blind readers throughout the state.

The Commission has been appointed by the Library of Congress as the distributing agency in Delaware for government-owned record

*Through the phonograph, works of literature are made available to the blind. These "talking books" are provided at no cost to the blind recipients.*

players. These talking book machines substitute the spoken word for the printed page, thus making available to the blind the great works of literature and other reading material. The recorded books are sent free to blind persons in Delaware from the Free Library in Philadelphia.

Blind Delawareans may receive financial assistance from the state. To be eligible for such aid, an applicant must have less than 20/200 visual acuity in the better eye with correctly fitted lenses, or must be suffering from a serious visual limitation. Also, the applicant must be at least 21 years old, a resident of the state at the time he lost his sight or for at least one year before the date of his application.

The Commission's administration of financial assistance to the needy blind of the state, often referred to as a "blind pension", actually is in no sense a pension. Rather, it is a form of pub-

lic assistance financed by the state and federal governments on a matching basis and granted to legally blind residents of the state who are in financial need. The purpose of the grant is to enable the needy blind person to maintain a standard of living compatible with decency and health.

To aid in the prevention of blindness, the Commission makes available information on sight conservation and eye care. It offers counseling and guidance to Delawareans confronted with visual impairment or impending blindness.

Every effort is made to follow up each case where an ophthalmologist, optometrist or medical doctor has made a recommendation for continual eye care. The Commission depends largely on professional personnel in the health field to see that any person who is blind within the legal definition is promptly referred.



## *Fun Has Its Place*

### Recreation . . .

Parties, boat rides, fishing trips and games are arranged for blind persons by the Commission. These activities are made possible by the co-operation of other agencies and clubs.

In 1946 the first Wilmington bowling team for the blind was formed. Bowling by the blind has been perpetuated through the joint efforts of the Commission and the Wilmington Lions Club.

Competitive games are played each week, alternately at home and away. Scores are kept and prizes awarded at the end of the season at an annual banquet.

The most dramatic achievement in the field of recreation for the blind is the operation of Landis Lodge. The lodge was established by the Delaware Commission for the Blind in 1930 at Centerville and, in 1956, was moved to Newport

Gap Pike. Any blind Delawarean in good health may spend two weeks at Landis Lodge each summer at no cost. Entertainment is provided at



*Landis Lodge, summer haven for blind Delawareans, is host to an average of eighty guests every season.*



*Using a hand rail as a guide, blind bowlers such as Hazel Smith shown here regularly compete against each other for honors.*

least twice each week by interested groups and individuals. About eighty blind guests visit Landis Lodge each summer. Landis Lodge was made possible through the generosity of Mrs. Irene du Pont. For many years it was located

on her estate. In 1956 it was moved to a location on Newport Gap Pike which is owned by the Delaware Anti-Tuberculosis Society.

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The Commission serves as Delaware's clearing house for all matters pertaining to the blind. Information about work for the blind anywhere in the world may be secured from the Commission. Also, the Commission acts as intermediary for blind Delawareans in securing free radios, braille transcription service, railroad and bus travel concessions, movie passes, special appliances such as braille watches and cooking timers, white canes and other devices which help to reduce the difficulty of a blind person living independently.

Transportation to and from clinics and doctors' offices is provided by the Commission. Other services are provided by volunteers who read and drive for blind "clients" and blind personnel of the Commission.

## *In Summary*

### A HALF CENTURY OF PROGRESS

In the half century just ended, the strides in work with the blind of Delaware have been made possible by the support and enthusiasm of hundreds of persons. To name them all would be impossible. However, any chronicle of the Commission would be incomplete without appropriate credit to at least a few. Among those who have made tremendous contributions to the work of the commission—with little fanfare—are the late H. B. Mearns, J. Francis Blaine and Dr. Emil R. Mayerberg. Mr. Mearns, former vice-president of the Wilmington Trust Company, served as treasurer of the Commission from 1922 until his death in 1957. Mr. Blaine is the oldest member of the present Commission in terms of service, having served on the body since 1930. Dr. Mayerberg has also passed the quarter-century mark in service, having been a member of the Commission since 1933.

The accomplishments during the 1909-59 period have been both encouraging and enlightening. The fact that many of Delaware's blind citizens are able to compete successfully with sighted workers in private industry demonstrates

the capability of selectively-placed workers and proves that it is ability—not disability—that should be stressed.

Developments in recent years suggest a very promising future for work in this field. The Commission must strive for continued improvement in its program, for better public understanding of blindness, and for ways to make blind workers more productive and machinery and equipment for blind workers more efficient. Most important, additional emphasis must be placed on the role of the blind person as an interested, intelligent and integral citizen of the community.

Blindness is a reality which must be faced by each individual who experiences it. Confidence must be developed by each blind person, as well as an awareness of the limitations and of society's attitudes toward blindness. Beyond that, the Delaware Commission for the Blind is charged with the responsibility of providing for the blind a hope, a dream, a ray of light in a world of darkness.

# Members of the Delaware Commission for the Blind

MRS. IRENEE DU PONT,  
*Honorary Chairman*

MRS. JESSIE C. WILSON,  
*Chairman*

J. FRANCIS BLAINE,  
*Secretary*

EMIL R. MAYERBERG, M.D.,  
*Treasurer*



HAROLD W. HORSEY,  
*Assistant Treasurer*

MRS. JAMES R. MORFORD

MRS. JAMES E. MARVIL

FRANCIS J. CUMMINGS, Ph.D.,  
*Executive Secretary*

*Members of the Delaware Commission for the Blind: (left to right) Dr. Emil R. Mayerberg, Dr. Francis J. Cummings, Mrs. Jessie C. Wilson, Mrs. James E. Marvil, Mr. J. Francis Blaine, and Mr. Harold W. Horsey. Mrs. James R. Morford, remaining member of the Commission, was out of the state when this photograph was taken.*







SEAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH  
OF MASSACHUSETTS

OFFICE

April 18, 1900

My Dear Mr. Henry Churchill:  
Secretary Commonwealth of the Blind  
100 State St. Boston  
Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Henry:

It is with great pleasure that I am writing to you and  
to the Board of the Commonwealth of the Blind. I am  
very glad to hear that you are all well and  
that you are all working hard for the  
benefit of the blind. I am very glad to hear  
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benefit of the blind.

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well and that you are all working hard  
for the benefit of the blind. I am very  
glad to hear that you are all working  
hard for the benefit of the blind. I am  
very glad to hear that you are all  
working hard for the benefit of the blind.

Very truly yours,

Hubert H. Hays  
Chairman